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ABSTRACT

The Southwest Regional Laboratory conducted a 1-year outcome evaluation of the 4-H After School Activity Program (4-H ASAP) in Los Angeles (California). The 4-H ASAP is designed to meet the needs of children aged 7 to 13 who live in urban public housing communities. The program creates a nurturing environment that offers a positive alternative to unstructured and unsupervised free time in neighborhoods where gang- related activities are prevalent. Four of 10 Los Angeles sites were selected for evaluation. Two provided services in the public housing community and two provided services in the elementary schools. Sixty-two participants from the original target group of 114 completed a self-concept posttest and a participant questionnaire designed for the program. No changes in self-concept were found for program participants, but over 85% of the participants reported that the 4-H program helped keep them out of gangs. Ten percent of these children reported that they had been in a gang prior to joining the 4-H program. Almost all (98%) of the children reported that they had made friends at the 4-H program, and 41% said that they would be hanging out in the streets without it. Interviews with the teachers who taught most of these participants indicated that teachers thought that students were learning problem solving and were increasing their interest in their school work. Sixty telephone interviews with parents indicated that parents also saw improvements in their children's attitudes as a result of 4-H participation. Overall the level of enthusiasm for the program for students, teachers, and parents was high. (Contains one figure, eight tables, and one reference.) (SLD)

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ED 405 408

DOES AN URBAN 4-H PROGRAM MAKE DIFFERENCES IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN?

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Introduction

Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) was contracted to conduct a one-year outcome evaluation of the 4-H After School Activity Program (4-H ASAP) in Los Angeles. The 4-H ASAP is designed to meet the needs of children ages 7 to 13 who live in public housing communities. The 4-H ASAP creates a nurturing environment that offers a positive alternative to unstructured, unsupervised free time in neighborhoods where gang-related activities are prevalent. This report will begin with a description of the project, including project goals, background information, and structure. A discussion of evaluation methodology, findings, and conclusion will follow.

Project Description

The 4-H program, administered through the Cooperative Extension service, has an 80-year history of making a positive difference in the lives of young people. Although 4-H originally was designed for rural youth, the program philosophy of learning-by-doing under the guidance of a caring adult also applies to the inner city.

The 4-H ASAP in Los Angeles serves inner city children who are 7 to 13 years of age, when they are vulnerable to negative influences, but still open to positive influences. The program takes place in the targeted community, at a location where children and their families have easy access to program activities and services. Volunteers from the community, schools, sponsoring organizations, and corporations have a unique opportunity to get to know these young people and their needs and interests, and to share knowledge, skills, ideas and experiences with them in a positive setting. The volunteers expand the experiences of the children by arranging field trips to educational and cultural sites and visits to workplaces to be exposed to working environments.

Project Goals and Objectives

The 4-H ASAP goal is to improve the quality of life, physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually, for participating youth and to increase positive interactions among youth, parents, and other adults in the targeted communities.

Project objectives include:

- Provide attractive alternatives to unstructured leisure time.

- Provide a safe, accessible, nurturing environment.
- Increase the quantity and quality of adult-youth contacts.
- Motivate interest in learning by supporting intrinsic interests.
- Emphasize process over subject matter and learning-by-doing; support cooperative learning; develop junior and teen leaders.
- Encourage peer pressure to conform to group values. Develop group norms to increase respect for individuals, reduce aggressive or anti-social behavior.
- Provide a range of experiences designed to strengthen resiliency factors.

Project activities are based on the demonstrated interests of youth and include: physical fitness and nutrition, gardening and plant science, small animals, arts and crafts, leadership development, public speaking, and community service. Not all students' experiences are identical because there are multiple sites, with different site coordinators, and different groups of youth with different interests. However, all activities provided are in line with the project goals.

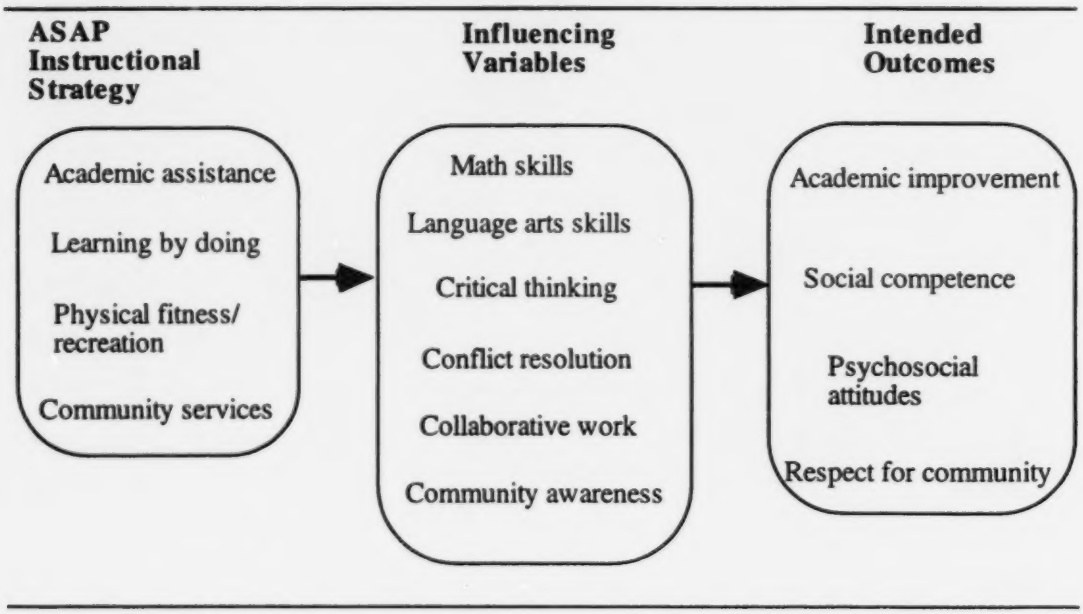
Specific 4-H ASAP activities are:

- *Homework counseling*: Participants are encouraged to bring their homework assignments with them after school. Site staff review assignments and provide guidance to participants as needed to help them successfully complete the assignment.
- *Physical recreation*: Site staff and junior teen leaders conduct outdoor games on a daily basis. Exercises that develop agility, coordination, and stamina are included. Games that develop teamwork are emphasized.
- *Nutrition*: Site staff schedule a daily nutrition break. Participants learn to prepare simple, nutritious snacks from fresh foods. Nutrition-oriented games and other curriculum materials are incorporated.
- *Hands-on project activities*: Youth are surveyed to determine their interests, and, when feasible, project activities are based directly on these identified interests. Tools and materials for conducting hands-on projects are provided for participants. Activities are structured to insure that participants have a successful learning experience, and participants work in groups with junior and teen leaders.
- *Community service*: Community service projects are the basis for developing leadership and communication skills. Participants learn to identify a community service project goal. Participants plan and implement the project, and they document the project and evaluate its success.
- *Other activities*: The enrolled youth and their parents have the opportunity to participate in field trips to various educational and recreational locations during the year. Other social activities are scheduled as feasible.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation is based on a conceptual framework that draws on SWRL's understanding of 4-H ASAP and the challenges it is addressing. The programmatic challenges include difficulties in achieving positive outcomes for young people living and learning in stressful, and sometimes unpredictable, environments. These challenges raise difficult measurement problems; therefore, the framework uses a variety of measures to determine the extent to which intended outcomes have been influenced by 4-H ASAP. Figure 1 illustrates this framework.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Data collection consisted of three methods: questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a cost-effective way to collect uniform data from various persons. For the 4-H ASAP evaluation, three surveys were administered. Because key sources of information may be Limited English Proficient (LEP), we administered a number of the questionnaires

orally, either in person or over the phone, using interviewers/surveyors who are fluent speakers in participants native languages.

First, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was administered to a core group of students. This instrument was used to address psychosocial outcomes related to 4-H ASAP. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale has subscales including:

- *Behavior*: Measures admission or denial of problematic behavior, e.g., "I get into a lot of fights;" "I often get into trouble."
- *Intellectual and school status*: Self-assessment of academic and intellectual abilities and general satisfaction with school.
- *Physical appearance and attributes*: Measures attitudes about child's physical characteristics; also self-assessment of leadership and ability to express ideas;
- *Anxiety*: Reflects general emotional states, including worry, shyness, sadness, fear, and feeling left out;
- *Popularity*: Self-assessment of how well others like the child.
- *Happiness and satisfaction*: Reflects a general feeling of being satisfied with life and easy to get along with.

Children are shown a number of statements that tell how some people feel about themselves, and are asked to indicate whether each statement applies to them, using dichotomous "yes" or "no" responses (Piers, 1984; p. 1). The instrument is designed to be used with school populations, third grade and up. The survey administration takes approximately 30 minutes. In addition to the self-concept measure, students were asked questions about their participation in 4-H ASAP, including what they believe they have gained from participation.

SWRL staff administered the questionnaires at each site and trained 4-H ASAP staff members to administer the questionnaire to students who were not present during the first survey administration. The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale was administered to students twice to determine differences in pre- and post- test self-concept scores. The first survey administration, the pre-test, immediately followed the identification of the sample of students, and the second, the post-test, occurred after students had been in the program for ten months to determine differences in self-concept scores between the first administration and the second.

Questionnaires were also administered to parents and teachers during telephone interviews. We asked parents and teachers to provide information about their children and

students' behavior through questions that are quantifiable in addition to more open-ended, in-depth questions. Questions to parents and teachers about 4-H ASAP participants asked whether they saw improvement in homework completion, problem solving, adapting to new situations, and peer cooperation.

Interviews

Interview protocols were developed to systematically collect data from a select group of participating teachers and parents. Teachers and parents were asked how students' behavior at school or in social situations has changed since their participation in 4-H. Teachers were asked to respond to questions about students' critical thinking skills and their ability to resolve conflict and work cooperatively. The interview protocol also asked teachers and parents about their perceptions of the 4-H ASAP program. SWRL staff conducted face-to-face interviews with teachers (during a one-time data collection phase), and additional interviews were done by telephone at teachers' convenience. All of the parent interviews were conducted by telephone.

Document analysis

Finally, mathematics, science/health, and language arts grades for the core group of students were retrieved and analyzed. Grade data were collected for two points: the beginning of the 1995-96 academic year, as students begin their involvement in the 4-H ASAP program, and at the end of the school year.

Table 1 outlines the data collection process and measures used.

Table 1
4-H ASAP Evaluation Process

4-H ASAP program area	Influencing variable	Outcome	Method	Measure
Academic assistance	Math, Science & Language arts grades	Academic improvement	Archival records reviews	School files
Learning by doing Community service Physical fitness/ recreation	Conflict resolution Collaborative work Critical thinking Community activities	Social competence Respect for community	Questionnaire, Interviews	Reports from teachers and parents on students' capabilities to resolve conflict, work collaboratively, and use critical thinking skills
Learning by doing	Self-concept	Psychosocial attitudes	Self-concept measure	Piers-Harris Self-Concept scale
Community service	Community activities	Respect for community	Questionnaires, Interviews	Reports from teachers and parents on students' concept and involvement in community; program records; participant questionnaire

Site Selection

Based on discussions between 4-H ASAP staff and evaluators, four out of the 10 sites were selected for the evaluation. The sites were selected based on their stability, accessibility, site location, and length of operation. Two of the selected sites (Dana Strand & Pueblo del Rio) provide services in public housing communities, while the other two (Compton Avenue & Dena) provide services in elementary schools. Additionally, two of the four sites were relatively new, with one site beginning services during 1993 and the other beginning in

November 1994. The other two sites were well established and had consistent leadership since their inception.

Informed Consent

An Active Informed Consent form was sent home with each potential program participant and required a signature from a parent or guardian. The Informed Consent addressed the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46 - Protection of Human Subjects and was approved by SWRL's Institutional Review Board. Specifically, the Informed Consent gave an explanation of the evaluation, benefits to the subject, confidential and voluntary nature of the process, and individuals to contact regarding questions or concerns. Additionally, the Informed Consent was translated into Spanish and Cambodian, which are the home languages of many participants.

Participant Identification

Site coordinators provided lists of participants from each of the four sites including participants' names, schools, and grades. A target group of students was selected based on their start date in the program. If participants were enrolled at the time of the pre-test measure, they were eligible for inclusion in the target group. Because 4-H ASAP is a drop-in program, a period of two weeks was devoted to surveying participants. All of the participants who took the pre-test during the two-week period of time became target group participants.

Results

The outcome evaluation results will be reported in three sections. The first section will describe results found for participants, followed by information from teachers, and finally parents. The section about participants will discuss results from the Piers-Harris Self Concept Measure, the 4-H ASAP Participant Questionnaire, and academic achievement/grade data. The results reported for teachers and parents are based on structured interviews conducted with them about their students and children.

Participants

Sixty-two participants from the original target group of 114 completed the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Measure posttest and the 4-H ASAP Participant Questionnaire (See Appendix). There are many factors leading to the high attrition rate, including the drop-in nature of the

program, changes in participants residence, and the after summer posttest. Of the sixty-two students, 38 were girls and 24 were boys. Forty-nine of the participants responded to the questionnaires in English, and 13 responded in Spanish. The children ranged in age from 7 to 15 with 87% falling between 8 and 13 years of age.

No significant difference was found between the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale pretest and posttest indicating that no change occurred in self-concept for 4-H ASAP participants. However, there are a few reasons to expect no change. First, some argue that self-concept cannot be measured at such an early age, and that children's responses to questions might differ from day to day, depending on what they have experienced that day. Second, both site staff and questionnaire administrators reported that participants had difficulty with the language used in the questionnaire. They said that the students found the language "outdated" and did not understand some of the items.

Third, and perhaps most important, 4-H ASAP students' scores on each scale of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept measure and overall tended to be average. For example, the mean 4-H ASAP participant score on the *behavior* subscale was 12.2 (pretest) and 12.7 (posttest), which corresponds to almost the 50th percentile. Scores on the *anxiety* and *popularity* subscales were also near the 50th percentile. Similarly, participants' scores on the *intellectual and school status*, *physical appearance*, and *happiness* subscales were at the 51st percentile. Differences are difficult to achieve when pretest scores are average.

In addition to the Piers-Harris Self-Concept measure, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about their participation in 4-H ASAP (see Table 2). Over 85% of the 62 children who completed the 4-H ASAP Participant Questionnaire reported that 4-H helps them stay out of gangs, and 10% indicated they were in a gang prior to attending 4-H.

Table 2
Response to 4-H ASAP-participant questionnaire

Item	Frequency		Percent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. I get help with homework	53	9	85.5	14.5
2. I feel safe in neighborhood	46	16	74.2	25.8
3. My family makes me come to 4-H	15	46	24.2	74.2
4. 4-H is boring	4	58	6.5	93.5
5. I feel safe at 4-H	60	2	96.8	3.2
6. I would watch more TV without 4-H	33	29	53.2	46.8
7. I have made friends at 4-H	61	1	98.4	1.6
8. 4-H helps me stay out of gangs	53	9	85.5	14.5
9. I finish my homework at 4-H	54	6	90.0	10.0
10. I would hang out in the streets without 4-H	25	36	41.0	59.0
11. I like to attend 4-H every day	50	11	82.0	18.0
12. 4-H should be open weekends	43	18	70.5	29.5
13. Neighborhood kids want me in their gang	11	50	18.0	82.0
14. I have learned to do new things at 4-H	58	3	95.1	4.9
15. Without 4-H I wouldn't do my homework	21	41	33.9	66.1
16. Before 4-H I was in a gang	6	54	10.0	90.0
17. 4-H should be open later or longer hour	41	21	66.1	33.9
18. I like the adults in 4-H	60	2	96.8	3.2

While almost 26% of the 4-H participants did not feel safe in their neighborhoods, only 3% did not feel safe while attending 4-H. An alarming 41% of children reported that they would hang out in the streets without 4-H, and 53% would watch more television. Almost all of the 4-H participants (98%) have made friends at 4-H, promoting peer relations in a positive environment.

Ninety-five percent said they have learned new things in 4-H. Over 85% also reported receiving help with their homework, and 90% report finishing their homework while attending

4-H. Additionally, participants indicated that they thought 4-H should be open longer hours (66%) and on weekends (70%).

As part of the 4-H Participant Questionnaire, children were asked what they liked and did not like about 4-H (see Table 3). Forty-four percent of the participants liked the activities and games most, and 23% liked getting help with their homework. When asked what they most disliked, 47% said they had no problems. The most prevalent problem (26%) involved the noise level in the room while doing homework, followed by problems with people (19%). Other students took the opportunity to again state they wanted 4-H to be open more hours.

Table 3
Participants' positive and negative feelings about 4-H ASAP

What do you like best about 4-H	Frequency	Percent
Help with learning/homework	13	23.2
Fun/friendly environment	14	25.0
Activities-art games	25	44.6
Like everything	4	7.1
What do you dislike most about 4-H		
Problems with people	8	19.0
Problems with noise	11	26.2
No problems	20	47.6
Want 4-H to be open longer	3	7.1

Academic Achievement

Grade data were retrieved for all of the students who participated in the posttest. Elementary School grades were retrieved from Holmes, Compton, Dena, and Hawaiian for 57 students in grades 1 through 6. Progress was analyzed for the following subjects: Language Arts, Mathematics, Health, Learning Skills, Social Skills, Home Studies based on the Los Angeles Unified School District Progress Reports. We will refer to elementary grades in terms of progress, because letter grades are not reported for elementary children. Progress is reported in terms of "area of strength, shows growth, and needs improvement."

For elementary school participants, there were significant changes in progress for Language Arts, Health, Learning Skills, and Social Skills. However, there were no significant differences in progress in Mathematics, and Home Studies (Homework completion). One of the possible explanations for not seeing an improvement in homework progress is that teachers

may not be receiving their students' homework assignments. While conducting interviews with teachers, a few of them stated that students were claiming to have done their homework, but were not bringing completed assignments to class. Teachers thought "it might not be a problem with homework completion, as much as with the responsibility aspect of bringing their completed homework to class."

Middle School grades were obtained from Dodson, Edison, Markham, and Stevenson for 16 students in grades 6 through 9. For middle school participants, only Language Arts, Mathematics, and History grades were common to all students, therefore only grades for those subject areas were analyzed. There were no significant changes in grades in any of the three subjects we were able to compare.

Teacher Interviews

At the end of the school year, face-to-face interviews were conducted with teachers from nine schools who taught about 65 4-H ASAP participants in the target group. The teachers were asked to rate improvements observed in their students, based on whether they believed the improvement, if any, occurred as a result of the 4-H program (see Table 4). The highest rated items were "solves problems" and "interested in school work," with 70% of the teachers reporting some or much improvement. Over 60% of the teachers also rated some or much improvement in "adaptive to new situations" and "cooperative with peers." Some or much improvement was reported in "handles anger appropriately" (54%) and "completes homework" (54%). The least improvement was reported in the category "remains calm when problems arise" (49%).

Table 4
Teacher interview quantitative percentage

Items	No Improvement	Some Improvement	Much Improvement	Do not know	Not applicable
Completes homework	15.8	21.1	33.3	5.3	19.3
Remains calm when problems arise	15.8	15.8	33.3	3.5	31.6
Solves problems	19.3	33.3	36.8	3.5	7.0
Adaptive to new situations	17.5	26.3	35.1	1.8	19.3
Interested in school work	19.3	19.3	50.9	0	10.5
Cooperative with peers	14.0	22.8	40.4	1.8	21.1
Handles anger appropriately	24.6	22.8	31.6	0	21.1

An overwhelming majority of the teachers (86%) said they would like their students to continue in 4-H and that they would recommend the program to others (91.2%). None of the teachers were aware of problems encountered by students while attending 4-H.

In addition to the scaled questions, some open-ended questions were asked, including: What is the most important change you have seen in your student?; Why should the student continue -or not- in the 4-H program? Why would you recommend -or not- the 4-H program to others? What problems did the student encountered at the club -if any-, and how could they be solved? After asking all the prepared questions, the teachers were invited to make additional comments about the students and/or the 4-H program. Their answers were carefully coded, analyzed, and categorized to produce a systematic count of responses (see Table 5).

Table 5
Teacher interview qualitative

What is the most important change in students participating in 4-H?	Frequency	Percent
Academic improvement	16	25.0
Character development	19	29.7
Social skills	16	25.0
Aesthetic/artistic sense	1	1.6
Behavior pattern	3	4.7
Verbal skills	1	1.6
None	8	12.5
Why would you like your students to continue in 4-H? (or not?)		
It is a good program	30	47.6
To avoid negative situations	6	9.5
Social development	8	12.7
Helps academic performance	11	17.5
Needs more structure/organization	8	12.7
Why would you recommend 4-H to other students? (or not?)		
Positive reinforcement	35	57.4
Child self-development	17	27.9
Children get what they cannot get elsewhere	1	1.6
Does not know enough about program	4	6.6
Needs better organization/structure	4	6.6
What problems have your students encountered?		
Not notified when site coordinator was not there	1	25.0
Changing locations for meetings	1	25.0
Attrition	1	25.0
Faulty communication with home and school	1	25.0
Additional comments		
There should be more help offered for social skills	1	4.3
There should be more tutoring for students	6	26.1
Communication with home and school needs to improve	9	39.1
Need financial aid to enable students to participate	5	21.7
Student no longer in program	2	8.7

When asked about the most important change in students who participate in 4-H ASAP, one fourth of the teachers reported an increased interest in schoolwork, and an improvement in attendance and learning in general. The category "character development" includes comments such as "strives to do better," "is more responsible," "has grown in maturity," "has a better sense of humor," "is more self-reliant to solve own problems," and "has an increased sense of self-esteem." About one third of all responses (29.7%) were included in this category. Teachers also observed growth in the participants' social skills (25%), such as getting along with others, being friendlier, more outgoing, and functioning cooperatively with their peers. Reported changes in behavior (4.7%) included staying on task, being "less whiny," and not "ditching" classes.

When giving reasons for students to continue in the program, teachers stated (47.6%) that the 4-H activities have a very positive influence on the students and enhance their understanding of mainstream culture. Some (9.5%) pointed out that participation in the program removes the children from negative and potentially dangerous situations, such as being locked up at home alone, or staying out in the streets without supervision. They also mentioned (12.7%) that it is important for the children to feel that outside adults are interested in them, and the program provides an opportunity for positive interactions with adults as well as peers. Some teachers (12.7%) thought the program needs better organization or a more structured environment.

Reasons for recommending the program were mostly attributed to the positive reinforcement (57.4%) that the program provides, with individualized help and hands-on activities. Although one teacher said the 4-H program was the "largest daycare on the block," others pointed out that "it is not just a baby-sitting program," but a good learning experience that teaches social skills and values to the participants (27.9%). Many teachers said they wanted to promote the program the following year, and would like to have someone visiting their classrooms to make announcements.

When asked about problems encountered by children in 4-H, one teacher said that neither the student nor the parents were notified when the 4-H site coordinator was not able to attend, and that sending flyers might help solve that problem. Another teacher said that the club had been moved around several times the previous year, but that now they had their own room and that was beneficial. One teacher said that the only problem she saw was the usual basic problem: there is strong interest at first, but then attendance drops. Another teacher suggested that it would be good to have more communication between 4-H and school to target each child's needs more specifically.

About a third of the teachers interviewed offered additional comments. The most frequent (39.1%) involved the need to increase the awareness of the opportunity to participate in the program; many teachers were not aware that their students were participating in 4-H ASAP. They recommended a presentation by 4-H staff at the beginning of the school year, to invite students and provide enrollment forms. Some said they would like to see more academic tutoring and emphasis on reading and practicing English (26.1%). A few suggestions for future activities included creating ways for students to earn money, due to their economically disadvantaged condition, and cleaning neighborhoods to create a sense of community.

Parent Interviews

Sixty telephone interviews were conducted with parents (see Appendix), using the same format and content as the teacher interviews (see Table 7). In general, parents rated positive improvements with a higher frequency than did teachers. They reported seeing some or much improvement in their child's ability to solve problems (83%) and interest in school work (83.4%). Moreover, they rated adapting to new situations (88.3%) and cooperation with peers (85%) much higher than did their children's teachers. The categories in which they saw less improvement, "remains calm when problems arise" (61.6%) and "handles anger appropriately" (56.6%), are the same that teachers rated also lowest, but still the parents indicated a higher positive appraisal.

Table 7
Parent interview quantitative percentage

Items	No Improvement	Some Improvement	Much Improvement	Do not know	Not applicable
Completes homework	11.7	28.3	48.3	0	11.7
Remains calm when problems arise	18.3	23.3	38.3	3.3	16.7
Solves problems	8.3	43.3	40.0	0	8.3
Adaptive to new situations	5.0	35.0	53.3	1.7	5.0
Interested in school work	11.7	16.7	66.7	0	5.0
Cooperative with peers	1.7	23.3	61.7	1.7	11.7
Handles anger appropriately	21.7	28.3	28.3	1.7	20.0

All the parents (100%) expressed a desire for their children to continue in the 4-H program. Almost unanimously (98.3%) they said they would recommend the program to others, and only three (5.1%) mentioned that their child had encountered a problem. The three problems were: One mother thought her son got into a fight, but he did not want to discuss it with her. Another said her daughter was sent home, and suspected the girl had trouble with a teen leader. The third said other children made fun of her son because of his weight, but that the staff had handled the situation.

Table 8
Parent interview qualitative

What is the most important change in your child due to 4-H?	Frequency	Percent
General school improvement	21	35.0
Grades improvement	5	8.3
Social skills	9	15.0
Self-development	18	30.0
No change and do no know	7	11.7
Why would you like your child to continue? (or not?)		
Keeps children off street and out of trouble	13	17.1
Keeps them busy	10	13.2
Learn new things	24	31.6
Offer academic help	11	14.5
Child and/or parent likes 4-H	9	11.8
Transferring to another school	3	3.9
Child does not want to go	3	3.9
No money for trips	2	2.7
Other activities prevent attendance	1	1.3
Why would you recommend 4-H to other children? (or not?)		
Fills a need/keeps them busy	24	27.9
Keeps children off streets and out of trouble	11	12.9
Varied learning experiences	20	23.3
Get help with homework	11	13.0
Already recommended	14	16.2
Parent has participated	4	4.5
Site is too far from home	2	2.3

The most frequent answer (35%) involved the child's general improvement regarding schoolwork. Parents said that their children like to study more than they did before and show more interest in attending school and completing their assignments. They also said (30%) the children act more responsibly and independently, and demonstrate more self-discipline. In addition, parents were impressed with the growth in social skills (15%), such as working well with others, being more cooperative, more helpful around the house, enthusiastic about friendships, obedient, and outgoing. A few parents (8.3%) mentioned the improvement in their child's grades and quality of their homework. Some parents (11.7%) reported no change, or did not know whether the change was attributable to the 4-H program.

When asked why they wanted their child to continue in the program, a third of the parents (31.6%) mentioned the fact that the children were learning new things. Another frequent response (17.1%) was that children would be kept off the streets, and keep busy with something positive. A number of parents (14.5%) considered academic help as a reason for continuing. However, one parent said there were so many activities that the child could not get the homework done. Some (16.8%) said they would like their children to continue just because they and/or their children liked the program. On the negative side, a few said they could not attend anymore, or that the child did not want to go because they could not afford to pay for the field-trips.

In response to the question of why they would recommend the program to others, almost a third (27.9%) of all parents mentioned that it helped the children occupy their time while doing positive things, rather than doing nothing or getting bored at home. The variety of experiences to which children are exposed was another point brought up by about a fourth of the parents (23.3%). They said children enjoy the animals, cooking, the arts and crafts, and other activities. Help with the homework (13%) and keeping the children out of trouble (12.9%) were also mentioned.

Conclusion

According to parents, teachers, and participants, 4-H ASAP is making a difference in the lives of the participants despite the lack of change on the self-concept measure. Participants reported that 4-H is keeping them out of gangs, they are getting learning assistance, learning new things, and are requesting that 4-H ASAP be open longer hours. Although grades did not go up for middle school participants, positive progress has been made in elementary school children in Language Arts, Health, Learning Skills, and Social Skills. The lack of difference in grades at the middle school level is attributable to two facts. First, the number of 4-H ASAP

participants included in this evaluation from the middle school level was small. Consequently, it is difficult to find significant differences. Second, it is more difficult to affect grades at higher school levels.

Although parents consistently gave higher ratings than teachers, both parents and teachers saw improvements in problem solving ability, interest in school work, and cooperation with peers. Over 85% of teachers and all of the parents interviewed wanted their students or children to continue to participate in 4-H, and would recommend the program to others.

In short, the 4-H ASAP program is having a positive impact on participants. Children, parents, and teachers value the program. The level of enthusiasm for the program is high. Most important, objective evidence of its merit exists.

Recommendation for Future Evaluation

In the future, we plan to continue collecting data about participants from questionnaires and parent and teacher interviews. However, given the expansion of the program, the sample of children and youth that are included in the study will represent a smaller and smaller number of the universe, and they may not remain representative. Current plans are to operate 51 sites, so focusing on participants in four sites will be inadequate. Further, the program is expanding to other cities, including Oakland, Kansas City, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Consequently, 4-H ASAP is seeking additional funding for an expanded evaluation, which will have two parts. First, it will increase the number of participants included in the study, and gather self-concept data, school records, and information from parents and teachers about the participants longitudinally.

Second, and perhaps more important, the questions addressed by the evaluation will increase. If additional resources for evaluation are available, we will look directly at some consequences of program involvement. For example, we will seek information about participant attitudes toward and involvement with gangs, views and use of alcohol and other drugs, attendance at school, and involvement in violence and vandalism. Further, we will conduct the study longitudinally, to find out whether the 4-H ASAP program has holding power and if effects are strengthened through long-term participation.

As the program expands, questions about implementation become increasingly important. If funding is available for an expanded evaluation, we plan to carry out in-depth studies of some sites. These studies will provide documentation of the variety of ways site coordinators implement the program, including how they work with youth to provide community service,

and the types of hands-on activities in which participants are engaged. For example, in Los Angeles, children and youth at one site designed and built a playground, and at others developed gardens. The in-depth studies will enable us to assist 4-H staff members to identify and share promising practices so that new sites can benefit from the experience of others. Further, the studies will enable us to understand how the program operates in different contexts and whether there are any effects on the community as well as on children and youth. Anecdotal accounts indicate that such effects occur, but systematic study is important.

To date, the 4-H ASAP has had positive effects. Community support for the program is strong, as evidenced by the variety of community, business, and governmental institutions involved. In the long run, however, enthusiasm based on anecdote and limited evaluation data will fade unless solid, credible results can be documented and shared.

References

Piers, E. V. (1984). *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale Revised Manual.* Western Psychological Services: Los Angeles, California.